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Celebrating and Advancing Magisterial Teaching on the Climate Crisis

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Introduction

Celebrating and Advancing Magisterial Discourse on the Ecological Crisis

Jame Schaefer

Theologians listen when the pope¹ and bishops speak. They have assumed responsibility for preserving and proclaiming the Christian faith for Roman Catholics and how the faithful should live accordingly in the world. Referred to as *the magisterium*, popes and bishops have exercised this teaching authority for centuries. The perils of industrialization and other major social issues during the nineteenth century prompted Pope Leo XIII and subsequent popes to address them through encyclicals and other statements that carry varying degrees of authority (e.g., Gaillardetz 2003). Among the major issues on which popes John Paul II (now Blessed John Paul II) and Benedict XVI (now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI) have written is the ongoing degradation of Earth that is adversely affecting materially poor and vulnerable people today, projected to severely affect future generations, and threatens the integrity of the biosphere. Throughout their pontificates, they underscored the moral responsibility the faithful have to mitigate these adverse effects, to transform consumptive lifestyles, and to live in harmony with God's creation so its goods are available to sustain all people now and into the future. Bishops throughout the world individually and regionally have issued many statements pertaining to ecological problems within their dioceses (Whittington 2004), emphasizing the urgency with which the faithful must gear their actions toward Earth's ability to sustain human life.

Whereas the magisterium speaks *for* the Catholic Church, theologians speak *from* the Church when addressing the loss of biological diversity, the degradation of ecological systems, threats to the biosphere, and their effects on humans. Theologians bring their specialized fields of inquiry to the service of the Christian faith by reinterpreting the language used so it adequately reflects the faith. They are especially conscious of the need for expressions of faith to be consistent with the deep meanings of the biblical and historical theological tradition, informed by the current scientific understanding of the world, and articulated as profoundly as possible to address ecological problems today. When popes issue encyclicals, mes-

sages, and statements pertaining to the human-Earth relationship, theologians listen to their teachings and, as scholars, independently and freely analyze them, engage in research, reflect on their findings, and publish articles, essays, and books that may extend magisterial teachings and point to fruitful ways of addressing issues from a theological perspective. Their efforts are aimed in part to help the magisterium update and articulate the Christian faith more appropriately while drawing their authority from the scholarly academy which demands rigorous analysis, research, and synthesis of their findings. Their work as scholars of the Christian faith parallels the work of the bishops who preserve and promulgate the Christian faith. Though they have special roles to play in relation to the Christian faith, they are both dedicated to it. Occasionally theologians and bishops have collaborated to draft magisterial documents as occurred during the Second Vatican Council.

Leaders of other religious traditions also listen to the magisterium of the Catholic Church, especially the popes, when addressing ecological issues. For example, from the Eastern Orthodox branch of Christianity, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople and New Rome, has been particularly attentive to ecological problems, has characterized those caused by humans as "sinful" (Stammer 1997), and has exchanged mutual concerns and efforts with John Paul II and Benedict XVI in general and on particular problems occurring in various parts of the world (e.g., Ecumenical Patriarchate 2013; Benedict XVI 2006, 2009a, 2009b; Howden 2002). Similarly, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has engaged at least one other Christian denomination in formal dialogue on the natural environment (United Methodist-Catholic Dialogue 2013), and more would be helpful. All Christian denominations and other religions share one planet, a "suffering" Earth (John Paul II 1989), and the cooperative as well as individual efforts of their leaders are essential to stimulate concern about Earth and to guide their faithful toward living in ways that sustain the integrity of our planetary home.

Theologians wish to help the magisterium with this task, and *Ecological Justice and Climate Change: Assessing Pope Benedict XVI's Ecological Vision for the Catholic Church in the United States* provides some examples that are promising. To facilitate this desire, the remainder of this introductory essay highlights the overall contributions that Benedict XVI has made to ecological teachings. Explained subsequently is the process for planning the November 2012 consultation that yielded the essays in this anthology and key features of the consultation. An overview of the contents of this volume follows with emphasis on the papers given and the contributions of two bishops who serve in opposite parts of two hemispheres. We close with hope that Pope Francis and the Catholic bishops of the United States will advance magisterial teachings on the human-Earth relationship and will find in theologians' efforts some fruitful directions.

POPE BENEDICT XVI'S LEGACY

Benedict XVI played a significant role in advancing concern about the ongoing threats to the integrity of Earth. He built upon the seminal efforts of his predecessor, John Paul II, who issued the first pontifical statement dedicated to the ecological crisis on the 1990 World Day of Peace and identified it as a moral problem for which the faithful are responsible. He left for Benedict XVI a legacy of statements, messages, and parts of encyclicals that seed ideas for future teachings. Benedict XVI embraced and advanced his predecessor's teachings. As essays in this anthology indicate, he repeatedly lamented the exploitation and destruction of God's creation—God's garden, God's gift. He urged the faithful to share in the responsibility of caring for this gift so its goods are available to all people, and he gave special attention to the materially poor and vulnerable who are often thwarted by economic, social, and/or political circumstances from sustaining their lives. He warned against overconsumption by some while others could not secure the necessities of life for themselves, their families, and their communities. He underscored the connection between ecological degradation and socio-economic inequities in his continual quest to promote justice among peoples and nations of the world in light of the growing chasm between the wealth of some and poverty of others. Though he lauded some technologies that have been helpful for enhancing human life and well-being, he expressed concern about the adverse effects that fossil fuels and other technologies are having on people today, are projected to impact future generations, and threaten the integrity of Earth. Several teachings were directed explicitly toward the perils of human-forced climate change. And, in his message on the 2010 World Day of Peace which prefaced this anthology, he repeated a theme that had become common in his teachings—the need to address ecological degradation in order to realize peace in the world.

Among Benedict XVI's most developed contributions to magisterial teachings on the ecological crisis is his understanding of the sacramental character of the world, which several essayists explore variously and richly in this anthology. In encyclicals, messages, and statements, he retrieved this biblical and traditional theological understanding that God's gift of the creation—the Earth and the totality of its vast expanding surroundings—is revelatory of God, that we can know something about God in and through the world, and that we can learn from studying the world how we should be functioning. Because Benedict XVI's ecological writings have been prolific during the short period of his pontificate, two collections of and commentaries on them have been published thus far. One is *The Environment* (Benedict 2012), and the other is *Ten Commandments for the Environment: Pope Benedict XVI Speaks out for Creation and Justice* (Benedict XVI and Woodeene Koenig-Bricker 2009). Many articles on his writings have appeared in journals and in *Confronting the Climate*

Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives (Schaefer 2011). We are delighted that this anthology adds another. His efforts have gone beyond writing to practical initiatives including the installation of solar panels to power the lighting, heating, and cooling of a portion of Vatican City, authorizing the Vatican's bank to purchase carbon credits by funding a Hungarian forest that would make Vatican City the only country fully carbon neutral, and using a new hybrid Popemobile. His ecological commitments overall have resulted in some people referring to him as "the green pope" (Stone 2013).

THE 2012 CONSULTATION ON BENEDICT XVI'S TEACHINGS

Appreciating Benedict XVI's prophetic ecological endeavors, representatives of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change (Coalition), and the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies at The Catholic University of America (CUA) recognized the need for careful reflection on Benedict XVI's ecological vision and its implications for the Catholic Church in the United States. They met in May 2011 to discuss the possibility of holding a consultation during which Catholic scholars could present papers and engage in discussion with bishops regarding the implications of Benedict XVI's teachings. Previous consultations had been held in response to the U.S. Catholic bishops call in 1991 to "*theologians, scripture scholars, and ethicists to help explore, deepen, and advance the insights of our Catholic tradition and its relation to the environment and other religious perspectives on these matters*" in their pastoral document *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*. These consultations provided an opportunity to consider environmental issues more deeply from a faith perspective, to ask questions of one another, and to recognize some challenges ahead. The consultation on "Ecology and Catholic Theology: Contribution and Challenge" that was held at Mount Angel Abbey in Portland, Oregon during the summer of 1995 provided the papers and material that were eventually published as "*And God Saw that It was Good:*" *Catholic Theology and the Environment*, edited by Drew Christiansen, S.J. and Walter E. Grazer (1996). Following this precedent, a decision was made to hold a consultation at The Catholic University of America to be attended by several interested bishops, selected scholars, staff of the sponsoring organizations, and leaders of national Catholic organizations.

Early in the planning process, the USCCB, Coalition, and CUA staff formed an advisory group of Catholic scholars. They proved invaluable in assisting the sponsoring organizations to refine the categories of scholarship for the consultation, draft a call for papers, sort and prioritize the papers that best fit the themes and goals of the consultation, and shape

the structure and flow of the consultation. Forty-four proposals were received from scholars, William D. Dinges, Ph.D., Ordinary Professor of Religious Studies in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America, narrowed the pool to twenty-five, and twelve were subsequently selected by the following scholars who joined Dr. Dinges in this effort: Sr. Ilia Delio, OSF., Ph.D., Research Fellow, Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University; Sr. Mary Ann Hinsdale, IHM., Ph.D., Associate Professor of Theology, Boston College; Jame Schaefer, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Theology, Marquette University; Lucia Silecchia, Esq., Professor of Law, Columbus School of Law, The Catholic University of America; Br. Keith Warner, OFM, Ph.D., Associate Adjunct Lecturer, Santa Clara University; and Tobias Winright, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Theological Ethics, St. Louis University. Several phone conferences were held between September 2011 and August 2012 to finalize and group the selections.

To accommodate the bishops who expressed interest in the consultation, November 8-10, 2012 was chosen to coincide with the semi-annual meeting of the U.S. Catholic bishops in Baltimore, Maryland. Participating in the consultation were Bishop Frank Dewane (Venice, Florida), Bishop Donald Kettler (Fairbanks, Alaska), Bishop John Ricard (Emeritus of Pensacola-Tallahassee, Florida), Bishop William Skylstad (Emeritus of Spokane, Washington), and Bishop Jaime Soto (Sacramento, California). Bishop Bernard Unabali of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea was invited to share his experience in assisting with the relocation of some of the world's first "climate refugees," the Carteret Islanders.

The bishops-scholars consultation proved to be a joyous and stimulating event. From Thursday afternoon through Noon on Saturday, the participants gathered to listen and respond to one another. We prayed together. We opened to God's grace for strength to deal with the vexing reality of human-forced climate change and its justice implications. We participated in a Eucharistic liturgy at which Bishop Kettler delivered a thought-provoking homily that closes this anthology. We shared concerns and problems particular to our missions. And, we expressed our mutual desire to collaborate in the future. The culminating session was both celebratory and poignant. Under the rubric of "Meaning, Messages, and Messengers," the panelists found in the consultation an opportunity to explore promising magisterial teachings, especially by Benedict XVI, and theological reflections based on research by scholars who are striving to address human-forced climate change and other ecological problems. Other meaningful outcomes of the consultation included an opportunity to express mutual appreciation for the varied ways in which the bishops, scholars, and staff of the sponsoring organizations have been addressing the climate crisis, to identify directions in which to move forward concurrently to mitigate the adverse effects that are especially devastating for the most materially poor and vulnerable people in the world, and to

provide a forum for emerging scholars who are eager to address ecological issues.

Surfacing throughout the bishops-scholars consultation was the message that there are many riches in the Catholic theological tradition for retrieving, updating by contemporary findings (the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities), and creatively working to address human-forced climate change. This realization needs to be celebrated, developed by scholars, and made more readily available to the faithful for their stimulation and application at all levels of social, economic, and political endeavor. Because scholars are required by their profession to produce works for the academy, making them available at palatable levels for other adults and youths may require collaboration with skillful speakers like the Coalition's Catholic Climate Ambassadors, writers, and media experts.

The messengers are many and varied—bishops, pastors, priests, catechetical leaders, Catholic agencies and organizations, media, scholars, and institutions of higher learning. The bishops are primary messengers, and their voices may be especially effective and timely when issuing reflections on ecological issues on appropriate memorial days (e.g., the feast of St. Francis of Assisi—October 4, Earth Day—April 22, and Climate Change Day—December 1), encouraging reflection by priests and incorporation into their homilies, and assuring that seminaries in their dioceses cover magisterial teachings, creation theology, and theological discourse on the human responsibility to God for functioning in ways that aim to assure the sustainability of Earth. Pastors of parishes are messengers by working with priests and parishioners to inform and raise their awareness of magisterial teachings and theological discourse on the climate crisis and other ecological issues that may be pertinent to their locales. Priests are messengers by delivering homilies on magisterial teachings and theological insights on the human-Earth relationship and the obligations to function compatibly with other species within shared ecological systems as constituents of the larger biosphere. Priests are also messengers when encountering parishioners at the confessional, guiding them in seeking reconciliation with God and God's creation for actions that cause ecological degradation, and helping them commit to acting more prudently, justly, and moderately in the world. Communities of professed religious are messengers by striving to live sustainably as an example to others, investing wisely in Earth-sustainable technologies and funds, and developing ecologically compatible initiatives that reflect their missions. Catechetical leaders of adult and youth education and activities are messengers by developing projects aimed at facilitating reflection and action to mitigate the phenomenon of climate change and other ecological problems. The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Catholic Relief Services, and other organizations and agencies play vital roles as messengers who edu-

cate, act on ecological issues from a faith perspective, and serve the most poor and vulnerable who are adversely affected by climate and other ecological crises. The Catholic media carry messages to all who are interested and can choose to highlight magisterial statements and pertinent endeavors that focus on ecological problems. Catholic institutions at formative school, college, and university learning can be messengers by providing opportunities for students to learn about ecological issues from an interdisciplinary perspective and to recognize their moral obligations to mitigate adverse effects. Catholic scholars are messengers by continuing to research, publish, and engage students in academic endeavors that deepen their understanding of ecological issues and address them from theological perspectives informed by other disciplines. Other messengers within the Catholic community may exist and may surface, notably young people who have left the Catholic Church and discover the capability of the magisterial teachings and the Catholic theological tradition to address ecological issues. Hopefully, their voices will be raised through words and actions.

OVERVIEW OF THE ANTHOLOGY

This anthology opened with Benedict XVI's Message on the 2010 World Day of Peace. Delivered twenty years after John Paul II issued the first papal statement dedicated to the ecological crisis, Benedict XVI's *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation* establishes the imperative to bring about peace in the world by protecting and assuring equitable access to the water and air as gifts from God intended for all. He applies many of his prior constructs to the task, including human ecology, integral human development, and intergenerational solidarity, and he calls upon all people of good will to assure that the vulnerable and poor in our midst have access to these gifts and that they are available to future generations. The quest for peace will become easier, he insists (#14), "if all acknowledge the indivisible relationship between God, human beings and the whole of creation."

The papers presented by the scholars center around four themes, the first of which focus on Benedict XVI's teachings on *human and natural ecology* and *human life and dignity*. In "Bonaventure in Benedict: Franciscan Wisdom for Human Ecology," Br. Keith Douglas Warner, OFM retraces Benedict XVI's intellectual footsteps and explains how St. Bonaventure's wisdom theology helps interpret the pontiff's understanding of "human ecology." Warner identifies several distinct features of Bonaventure's creation theology that are found in Benedict XVI's teaching, especially Bonaventure's understanding of God's creation as the "book of nature" through which the faithful can better understand God, and concludes convincingly that the pontiff's use of Bonaventure's thinking has

the potential for engaging Catholics to care for Earth. Mary A. Ashley's essay, "If You Want Responsibility, Build Relationship: A Personalist Approach to Benedict XVI's Environmental Vision," advocates a "personalist" theology as found in the pontiff's teachings and in the 2004 *Compendium on the Social Doctrine of the Church*. In contrast with the dominant approaches to ecology found among some Protestants and especially by secular modernism, Ashley believes that a Catholic personalist perspective distinctively understands human existence as centered on a divine love that tends to move "outward" to encompass our more-than-human world. In "Natural Law and the Natural Environment: Pope Benedict XVI's Vision Beyond Utilitarianism and Deontology," Michael Baur finds the pontiff's teachings deeply embedded in the Catholic "natural law" tradition and identifies three metaphysical premises (the convertibility of being and goodness, the convertibility of being and order, and the uniquely intellectual nature of the human being) that resonate with but are distinguishable from some insights of contemporary environmental philosophy. Baur concludes that Benedict XVI provides an intellectually defensible and helpful alternative to deontological and utilitarian approaches to addressing environmental concerns.

The next set of three essays explore *solidarity, justice, poverty, and the common good* in Benedict XVI's teachings vis-à-vis ecology. In "Human, Social, and Natural Ecology: Three Ecologies, One Cosmology, and the Common Good," Scott Hefelfinger examines the pope's use of "human ecology" which situates human and natural ecology within the framework of the common good as conceptualized by Thomas Aquinas. Hefelfinger argues that taking this approach opens a way beyond anthropocentrism to a cosmocentrism that redounds to the good of all creatures in ways that are appropriate to their natures. This perspective also offers timely and creative suggestions for the Catholic Church in the United States as it struggles to come to terms with today's ecological challenges. Christiana Z. Peppard builds upon the premise that humans are forcing changes on Earth systems in "Commodifying Creation? Benedict XVI's Vision of the Goods of Creation Intended for All." Focusing on the significance of Catholic social teaching in relation to the central concepts of the universal destination of the goods of creation and fundamental human rights, she gives special attention to air and water to show that papal encyclicals in recent decades have prophetically specified that some goods are so vital that they transcend market value. These goods constitute right to life issues that Catholics should take seriously and require changes to current economic systems and practices. In "The Grammar of Creation: Agriculture in the Thought of Pope Benedict XVI," Matthew P. Whelan studies Benedict XVI's treatment of agriculture, focusing primarily on his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* and his addresses to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on the occasion of World Food Day. Among the central questions Whelan probes are the need to

pay attention to the grammar of creation, how to read it appropriately, and how the practice of agriculture would look accordingly. To attend to the grammar of creation, Whelan argues, is to attend to what Benedict calls "the astonishing experience of gift," and making good use of the common gifts of creation is essential to the practice of agriculture. Whelan concludes by tracing the continuity between Benedict XVI's approach to agriculture with natural scientists, including soil scientist Albert Howard, plant geneticist Wes Jackson, and entomologist Miguel Altieri.

The *sacramental character of the world* is a topic that Benedict XVI explored early in his scholarly career and advanced as Cardinal Josef Ratzinger and subsequently during his pontificate. Though three essays focus specifically on this topic, it also surfaces in several other essays in this anthology because it is so foundational to his theological discourse. In "The Way of Wisdom: 'Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life' (Prov 3:14)," Elizabeth Groppe points to Benedict XVI's teaching that the faithful should view the world as an expression of God's loving plan (wisdom) to be valued intrinsically and used responsibly and respectfully. She surveys similar thinking in the wisdom literature of the Bible and the Christian theological tradition, notes how it was challenged by modern science, and suggests possibilities for recovering the wisdom tradition today. Especially important for mitigating the climate crisis is the need to study the functioning of living and inanimate entities in relation to one another and to strive to mimic their interactions. Monsignor Kevin Irwin's essay on "The World as God's Icon: Creation, Sacramentality, Liturgy" follows in which he explains today's environmental crisis as both a challenge and an opportunity for the Catholic Church to respond pastorally from its rich theological tradition. By framing major Catholic beliefs (creation theology, the incarnation, the principles of sacramentality and mediation, participation, the common good, and beauty) within the context of the liturgy and the sacraments, appealing to the adage *lex orandi, lex credendi*, and examining magisterial teachings, especially Benedict XVI's, the world can be recognized as God's icon where the divine is experienced and revealed. Irwin finds this insight instrumental in increasing believers' awareness of and appreciation for the interdependence of the entire creation. In "Pope Benedict XVI's Cosmic Soteriology and the Advancement of Catechesis on the Environment," Jeremiah Vallery considers the catechetical approach to the ecological crisis as a social justice issue insufficient to convince the faithful to care for Earth and finds a more effective basis in Benedict XVI's cosmic soteriology that was influenced by Teilhard de Chardin. Appropriating passages from the pontiff's works and constructing catechesis around his three pillars of the cosmic extent of Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection, liturgical worship, and the common eschatological destiny of humans and Earth, Vallery demonstrates how these essential aspects of the

Catholic faith relate to the natural environment and can serve to motivate the faithful to protect God's creation.

The final three essays focus on *the Catholic faith in action*. Maryknoll Missionary John T. Brinkman approaches his topic, "Discernment of the Church and the Dynamics of the Climate Change Convention," from the perspective of the history of religions and the realization that all humans are drawn by their faiths to acknowledge their common inheritance of Earth and their common destiny in resolving the climate crisis. Benedict XVI contributes to this realization, Brinkman insists, by intimately connecting economic and social equity concerns with ecological integrity. Emphasizing this nexus within the ongoing international discourse on climate change should stimulate attention to the spiritual and moral issues underlying the need to take action to mitigate the devastating effects on the most vulnerable people. In "American Lifestyles and Structures of Sin: The Practical Implications of Pope Benedict XVI's Ecological Vision for the American Church," David Cloutier focuses on Benedict XVI's teachings in his 2009 encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*. As other scholars have noted, Benedict XVI ties climate change to other moral issues and directs the faithful to rethink their lives in two specific ways—reduction of energy use and rejection of hedonistic lifestyles. Cloutier argues that the suburban ideal constitutes a structure of sin that must be challenged on both personal and social levels. The desire for luxury, especially in transportation and housing, must be recognized as sinful in order to prompt a conversion to more sustainable lifestyles and a desire for the Kingdom of God. The last of these informative and stimulating essays is Anselma T. Dolcich-Ashley's "American Nature Writing as a Critically-Appropriated Resource for Catholic Ecological Ethics." Concerned with what prompts a change of mind and heart to make a commitment to take action on environmental crises, she turns to classic American nature writers for some insight. She finds in selected writings of John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Annie Dillard the capacity to put readers into a place of personal encounter with non-human nature, to enable us to examine prior assumptions, and to transform both our rational understanding and emotional responses. This distinctive genre of American nature writing also provides interdisciplinary cultural resources for Americans to develop positive responses to the gratuitousness of God's creation, to identify sinful action and experience contrition, and to contemplate God's concurrent transcendence of and immanence in the world.

Closing this anthology are two poignant entries. The first is the text of the presentation by the Most Reverend Bernard Unabali, Bishop of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, who shares a remarkable story of the Carteret Islanders who are refugees of the climate crisis. He begins with the historical background of the Carteret Islands, describes the Islanders, their traditions, and their geographical setting, and explains the devastating effects that human-forced climate change has had on them. Depicted

in the film *Sun Come Up* (2011), the rising sea levels exacerbated by more frequent storms and high tides have forced the relocation of all Islanders to the mainland. Bishop Unabali assisted in this effort by appealing to the people of his diocese who live on the mainland to accept their moral obligation to help their brothers and sisters in Christ. The Islanders responded to this generous offer, some were relocated to Bougainville, and others began independently to move from their ancestral grounds while trying to maintain their cultural identity. Because the people of his diocese were so deeply motivated by their faith to act on the dire circumstances of the Carteret Islanders, Bishop Unabali is hopeful that this gift of faith will continue to be embraced and passed to future generations.

The second appendix consists of the homily given by the Most Rev. Donald J. Kettler at the Eucharistic Mass celebrated by the Most Rev. William S. Skylstad, Bishop Emeritus of Spokane and Honorary Chairman of the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change. In his homily, Bishop Kettler shared two major concerns he is addressing in his diocese. One is the plight of the Eskimos in the Yup'ik village of Newtok where rising ocean waters and a later autumn freeze are washing away the protective coastland, threatening to inundate the village within ten to fifteen years, and forcing them to abandon the subsistence lifestyle of hunting, fishing, and gathering that was established by their ancestors thousands of years ago. The difficulties these Indigenous people in the North Western Hemisphere are facing parallels the immense problems the Carteret Islanders are experiencing in the South Eastern Hemisphere, thereby manifesting the vulnerability of some of the most materially poor people in the world to the adverse effects of the climate crisis. Bishop Kettler's related concern is the ongoing exploitation of non-renewable sources of energy in Alaska that is harming the lives of the local people and the ecological systems in which they function. He is hopeful that Catholics will become "bridge builders" by drawing upon magisterial teachings, grappling with ethical questions, fostering understanding among people, and providing guidance on a path forward to respect human and non-human life and to safeguard the goods of Earth for future generations.

ADVANCING MAGISTERIAL TEACHINGS—HOPE IN POPE FRANCIS AND THE BISHOPS

Pope Francis has stimulated our hope that he will advance magisterial teachings beyond his predecessors and provide an effective voice for the Catholic Church that is needed today as the effects of human-forced climate change on people, other species, ecological systems, and the biosphere are recognized. Why do we have hope? As many have noted, he chose as his namesake St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of people who promote ecology, the epitome of humility and simplicity, and the

lover of humans and other animals. Pope Francis adopted a simple lifestyle, thereby providing an example for Catholics to follow Christ more closely, stand in solidarity with the materially poor and vulnerable, and minimize our consumption of the goods of Earth. Pope Francis presented himself humbly to the world by choosing to live in community with other professed religious and handling mundane tasks for himself by himself. And, during his inaugural Mass at St. Peter's Square on the Feast of St. Joseph, Pope Francis (2013) proffered the foster father of Jesus as the exemplar of a "protector" for all, including "all creation." The newly installed pontiff explained:

The vocation of being a 'protector,' however, is not just something involving us Christians alone; it also has a prior dimension which is simply human, involving everyone. It means protecting all creation, the beauty of the created world, as the Book of Genesis tells us and as Saint Francis of Assisi showed us. It means respecting each of God's creatures and respecting the environment in which we live. It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about. It means caring for one another in our families: husbands and wives first protect one another, and then, as parents, they care for their children, and children themselves, in time, protect their parents. It means building sincere friendships in which we protect one another in trust, respect, and goodness. In the end, everything has been entrusted to our protection, and all of us are responsible for it. Be protectors of God's gifts!

He continued:

I would like to ask all those who have positions of responsibility in economic, political and social life, and all men and women of goodwill: let us be 'protectors' of creation, protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment. Let us not allow omens of destruction and death to accompany the advance of this world!

Thus, we pin our hopes on these promising signs of the direction Pope Francis may take to address climate change, the loss of biological diversity, and other issues that threaten the sustainability of Earth. We anticipate that he will deepen and demonstrate the indisputable connection between ecological degradation and the ongoing plight of materially poor and vulnerable people now and in the future as Benedict XVI underscored repeatedly throughout his pontificate. We anticipate that Pope Francis will help focus the faithful on the Franciscan and Ignatian sense of God's presence in and through the world and the outpouring of God's grace to us to live respectfully and responsibly in relation to one another and all creatures of Earth as mutual members of the Earth community. And, we anticipate from his example of humility that he will

lead us into a more realistic theological anthropology in which we humbly recognize our interrelatedness and interconnectedness with other species and abiota from whom and with whom we evolved into existence as God's ongoing creation and upon whom we are utterly dependent for sustaining our temporal bodies as we yearn for everlasting life in the presence of God.

Can we also hope for the first encyclical dedicated to the climate crisis and related ecological issues of which there are many? For calling attention to the ongoing loss of biological diversity and other human interferences with Earth's processes and systems that must be abated? For identifying with leaders of other world religions a shared basis for addressing ecological degradation (e.g., a sense of the sacred in and through the world) and pointing to ways in which the faithful should live in relation to other species, ecological systems, and the biosphere? We are open to being surprised by this thoughtful, sincere, humble, and inspiring person who has become the 267th pope of the Church.

Finally, we have hope for the Catholic Church in the United States. Because our country is one of the leading contributors to the present climate crisis through its consumption of fossil fuels that emit greenhouse gases (U.S. EPA 2013) and because Catholics constitute approximately 24 percent of the U.S. population (Pew Forum 2013), the Church has a moral obligation to respond as a composite of laity and hierarchy. We hope that the bishops will lead the faithful in awakening to the reality of the climate crisis, the unjust plight of the vulnerable and materially poor who are most adversely affected now and into the future, and the threats to the sustainability of Earth. We also hope that the bishops will join theologians in tempering a strictly instrumental valuation of the goods of Earth with an understanding of the intrinsic value of other species, the air, the land, the waters, and ecological systems in and for themselves. If called upon by the bishops, scholars are willing and ready to help, thereby continuing the cooperation that was evident during the 2012 Catholic Consultation on Environmental Justice and Climate Change: Assessing Pope Benedict XVI's Ecological Vision for the Catholic Church in the United States.²

NOTES

1. The pope also serves as the Bishop of Rome.

2. Many thanks to Dan DiLeo, Project Manager for the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, and Cecilia Calvo, Project Coordinator for the Environmental Justice Program and Climate Change of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, for providing background information leading up to the consultation. I am also grateful to Dan Misleh, Founding Executive Director of the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, and Tobias Winright, Associate Professor of Theological Ethics at St. Louis University, for their suggestions when this introductory essay was nearing completion.

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